

ADEN AFTER THE RIOTS

Report on a Middle East Portent

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THE charred shells of the burnt-out buildings of the Jewish boys' school and girls' school along the main street of Crater (oldest part of the colony of Aden and in fact the crater of an extinct volcano) are a symbol of the destruction which last December befell one of the oldest Jewish communities in the world. The "knife-rests" and the barbed wire entanglements, placed each evening at all the entrances to the Jewish quarter, mark the relapse into medieval ghetto insecurity of a community which for a hundred years has enjoyed British citizenship.

The British colony of Aden—located in southwest Arabia—is a hundred years old; but the Jewish community of Aden goes back to the earliest dispersion of the Children of Israel. In the Middle Ages, Benjamin of Tudela, that greatest of Jewish travelers, told how the Jews of Aden were not subject to the yoke of the Gentile. But today the Jewish community of four to five thousand lives almost entirely in the crater, in a section of six streets, of which two have names, and the others are known impersonally as A1, A2, A3, and A4.

The houses are built in solid blocks, back

to back, without a sign of courtyard or garden; and the blocks are separated by "sweepers' passages," for the clearing of refuse. Most of the Jews have their shops and stores along the main roads that border the quarter, and in the bazaar which they share with Arabs and Indians. A few wealthy families have their stores in a different part of the town, in the section commonly known as "Steamer Point," where the big ships land their passengers.

IN THE riots that broke out suddenly last December 2 after the decision of the United Nations in favor of partition in Palestine, and following an appeal of the Arab League for a three-day strike of protest in all Arab countries, over eighty Jews were killed and as many seriously wounded. Fourteen Jewish houses were burnt to the ground, and many more were looted. Of one hundred and seventy Jewish shops and stores, over a hundred were burnt or looted and the two Jewish schools were burnt out.

It is alleged that the greatest part of the casualties was caused by the military force, the Aden Protectorate Levies, which were called in by the civil authority when the police were unable to deal with the mob. The Aden Levies are composed of Arab tribesmen with British and Arab officers. It was apparently asking too much for them to take firm action against Arab looters attacking Jewish houses and shops. They soon turned to take an active part themselves in the looting and shooting of Jews.

A Jewish quarter in the neighboring township of Sheikh Othman was destroyed at the same time, and all the Jewish inhabitants, including four hundred and fifty Yemenites waiting to go to Palestine, had to be evacuated to the camp of Yemenite Jews.

NORMAN BENTWICH has had a distinguished career in both public service and the academic world. He was born in London in 1883 and was appointed, in 1912, inspector of courts at the Egyptian ministry. Following the establishment of the British mandate in Palestine, Professor Bentwich served as attorney general in the Palestinian administration. In 1932, he became professor of international relations at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He is the author of numerous books on philosophy and Jewish affairs. They include: *Philo Judaeus of Alexandria* (1910), *Josephus* (1914), *Ahad Ha'am and his Philosophy* (1927), and a biography of Solomon Schechter (1938).

This camp now accommodates over three thousand. Lying in the sandy desert, it was formed two years ago when Jews from the Yemen waiting for their visas to Palestine so increased in numbers that they could no longer find a place in the town. At the Yemenite camp itself, there was no serious incident—perhaps because there was nothing to loot.

A party of British sailors from two destroyers, which had been hurriedly summoned to Aden, were able to take over the patrolling of the Jewish quarters on December 4. When on the morning of December 5 British troops, who had been flown from the Canal Zone in Egypt, arrived, the violent part of the riots had come to an end. After this grave outbreak at the beginning of December, a few serious incidents occurred later in the month; twice the military authority took over responsibility from the civil administration. But a further attack on the Jewish population was averted. A British military force has remained in Aden, and a part of it is stationed in Crater.

MR. BARNETT JANNER, M.P., visited Aden on behalf of the British Board of Deputies in January and helped the community to reorganize itself and to prepare its claims for compensation. The shock of the riots had been very deep, and several of the community's leading members had fled from Aden. With Mr. Janner, Mr. Viteles of the Joint Distribution Committee of America visited Aden, and brought material help for the refugees and the Yemenites in their desert camp. He was also instrumental in bringing in two young Palestinians for educational work in the camp, and he has found for the community in Aden itself a doctor, a trained nurse, a head teacher for the boys' school, and an administrator.

It was announced in February that the British Administration would hold two inquiries: one into the causes of the riots and the measures to be taken to prevent a further outbreak; the other into the damage suffered and the claims for compensation. The commissioner in the first inquiry

was Sir Harry Trusted, who was formerly Attorney General and then Chief Justice of Palestine, and afterwards of Malaya. It was agreed that the Aden Jewish community should be represented, and the writer went out to Aden on behalf of the Anglo-Jewish Association to help in the presentation of the Jewish case. A magistrate of the Aden Administration has conducted the second inquiry; and Mr. A. Diamond, who is also on the committee of the Anglo-Jewish Association, went out as counsel on behalf of the Jewish claimants.

Sir Harry Trusted knows all about riots and civil disturbances, and the inquiry once it started was conducted with great expedition. Besides the Jewish representatives, the Arab community, the government of Aden, and the British forces were represented by counsel. Some fifty witnesses were heard: government officers, British and other civilians, Jews, Arabs, and Indians. The proceedings were semi-public; the seven non-official members of the Legislative Council, who include three Arabs, two Indians, one Jew, and one Englishman, were present throughout the proceedings.

It is likely that the report of the Commission will not be published for some time. It will be submitted in the first place to the Governor of the colony. Then it will be passed to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, and only when he has considered it, and decided on the action to be taken about the recommendations, will it become a public document. In the meantime, the Jews are gradually returning to normal life and activity. Nearly five hundred claims for compensation have been presented, and the government is paying forthwith the smaller claims which are approved. It is also providing food for those who are still destitute.

THE riots have attracted the attention of the Jews to this neglected community of the East. The two schools that were burnt down in the riots were founded by members of the family of Messa, which in the last generation was the wealthiest and

most powerful in the community. The buildings were modern but the educational standards were not high. Only the head teacher in the boys' school had any academic qualification, and only a small number of the boys continued to the government secondary school. The community has not produced a single physician or a single lawyer, and scarcely any qualified teachers.

Paradoxically, the Yemenite camp in the desert is a more hopeful place than the Jewish quarter of Aden. Its habitations are like those of the Children of Israel in the wilderness of Sinai—booths (*sukkahs*) of matting. The camp is directed by a remarkable woman doctor, Olga Feinberg, originally from Russia, who worked in Palestine among Arabs as well as Jews for many years. Her home in Jericho was destroyed during the Arab revolt in 1938, and she went out to India. During the war she did fine service in India, and then, returning to Palestine in 1946, by an act of providence stopped off at Aden. From that time she has been administrator, doctor, and universal provider for the growing community, which increases by nearly one baby a day. The Joint Distribution Committee of America provides for the feeding in the camp, for the medical supplies, and other elementary needs.

The spirit of Palestine has been brought into the camp and gives it life. A few *shelichim* from the Halutz movement, two of them Aden-born but trained in the Yishuv, are spreading among the young and old a knowledge of Hebrew, the history and geography of Palestine, the socialist way of life, and the Zionist achievement. They are also teaching the Yemenites to sing and dance the songs and dances of the Yishuv.

It is an amazing community, these three or four thousand Yemenites and Adenites, crowded into a few acres, surrounded by barbed wire and holding their schools and their classes in the huts where they eat and sleep and learn. (Happily they have no need to fear cold and rain.) Compared with their habitations, the camps of the DP's

in Germany are splendid mansions. Yet a spirit of hope and of preparation dominates everything. More than half of the inhabitants are young people below seventeen years of age. But the adults as well as the youth and children have the thirst for knowledge of Hebrew and of the way of life of the Yishuv. It is quite exhilarating to hear the classes shouting together: "We will come to the Land though we may tarry on the way," reciting the story of the *Bilu* [a group of Jewish students who emigrated to Palestine in 1882], repeating the doctrines of Rousseau, or chanting the songs of the return as they used, in their synagogues in the Yemen, to chant the verses of the Bible.

IN THE established community of Aden, too, the urge is growing to migrate to Palestine, especially among the young people. You find them gathered in a dark upper chamber, drinking in the new gospel from one of the Halutzim.

Yet it is to be hoped that a number will stay in the old outpost of Israel. When the Palestine Jewish navy begins to sail the seas, Aden may become a Jewish as well as a British maritime station; and this community, which has lived for centuries with the Arabs and has Arabic as its native language, may be a link with the Orient. Aden Jewry, having passed the ordeal of fire in the tragic happenings of last December, may with the help of British and American Jewry be fitted by better education to take a full part in the life of the colony and to play its part also in the expansion of the Yishuv in the Middle East.

On the other hand, the Yemenites, who are waiting in the camp, should be transferred to Palestine as soon as immigration is open. They cannot be absorbed into the colony, which is already overpopulated, they will not return to the Yemen, and their one hope and faith is to get to the Jewish National Home and to take their part with the forty thousand Yemenite Jews already there in productive work.